

Side Brown

Little Village (Reprise) is the long awaited CD by the new band consisting of Ry Cooder and John Hiatt (guitar and vocals) Nick Lowe (bass and vocals) and Jim Keltner (drums). The four had worked before on Hiatt's Bring the Family, easily one of the best records of the last ten years. But this is not a John Hiatt album. It's a collaborative effort and a fun one at that.

While rhythm and blues is the overriding sound, it's not an R and B record. Little Village borrow from all their sources which include any kind of music remotely related to rock and have an obviously good time mixing things up on an energized bunch of often wacky, occasionally moving originals.

There aren't any of the emotional confessions of Hiatt's solo albums or even the pop flavored delights of Lowe's best work. The tunes are irreverent, sometimes silly in an offbeat Traveling Wilburys sort of way. It's funky and familiar music that immediately makes you think of songs you've heard before. "A Fool Who Knows" brings back the Temptations' "It's Growing," while the vocals on "The Action" are right out of the Coasters' song of your choice.

Virtually all the songs have something to recommend them whether a great Hiatt vocal or a stunning Cooder guitar solo. The more you listen, the more you discover with different songs hitting you at different times.

On "Big Love," Hiatt's gospel-influenced vocals are right on the mark, so heavy and so right that you might not realize how good it is the first listen, and then there's the lowdown,
(more)

2 Side Brown

heavy groove that builds with Cooder's guitar more intense with each verse while Keltner turns on the power at the end.

"Don't Go Away Mad" has an irresistible chorus and a million different things happening musically while "Don't Bug Me When I'm Working," draws on both Gospel and field hollers to be a hysterical and funky closer to a very funky record.

Another funky musician is Texas bluesman, Clarence Gatemouth Brown who'll be at the Chestnut Cabaret next Tuesday with the Dukes of Destiny opening. Brown's music goes beyond blues into swing, jazz and occasionally country. A multi-instrumentalist, playing guitar, fiddle and piano, Brown's albums and performances have sometimes been less than exciting. However, his new album No Looking Back (Alligator) is a return to form. Brown has never stuck to the ordinary and here he does three very different songs by legendary songwriter John D. Louderback: the funky "Dope," a bit of humorous novelty on "Alligator Eating Dog," and a ballad combining soul and country "I Will Be Your Friend," (sung as a duet with Michelle Shocked).

It's Brown's Texas-swing guitar that sets him apart and he lets loose on several tracks including Ellington's "C-Jam Blues," "Stop Time" and "The Peeper."

If the show is as hot as this record, it will be well worth attending.

By the way, all the Cabarets have instituted a new (and welcome) policy concerning starting times. Weeknight shows now start at 8 p.m. with the headliner appearing at 9:15, while weekend shows start at 9 p.m. with the headliner on at 10:15. Hopefully some of the
(more)

3 Side Brown

smaller clubs and bars will consider something similar.

Also next Tuesday, singer-songwriter Bill Morrissey appears at the Painted Bride. Morrissey's new album *Inside* (Philo/Rounder) which combines folk-influenced originals with touches of blues, country, rock and pop has been getting a lot of deserved attention. He sings in a slightly croaky combination of Chris Smither and Steve Goodman, but it's his ability to write direct, down-to-earth songs that tug at your heart as well as a flair for storytelling that makes this album.

The music is relaxed and folky with tasty accompaniment most notably by the great Johnny Cunningham on fiddle, but the lyrics which often deal with messed up romance are passionate and not as simple as they appear. While the opening title track is pleasant wistful pop, it's on the second song, "Everybody Warned Me," a country-tinged ballad, with a speedily strummed acoustic setting a rollicking rhythm that Morrissey hits it. The song has an air of mystery which suggests more than the lyrics state and makes you want to go back and hear it again.

Even better is the simply beautiful "Off-White" about a couple both previously married planning their wedding and trying to do it right this time. The pain of the past is achingly evident in a way real enough to make the listener cry. The chorus about "Hiring a band that won't play 'Proud Mary'... and nothing but our requests" heightens the bare-bones realism of the song.

Another standout is "Robert Johnson," a song about the blues legend. Perhaps more
(more)

4 Side Brown

than any other song, this demonstrates Morrissey's top notch songwriting skills. Instead of setting it as a blues, it has a haunting melody complimented by John Jennings' Mark Knopfler styled guitar and Ron Levy's organ. Never mentioning slide guitar, Morrissey brilliantly captures mostly by suggestion the haunted desperation of Johnson's blues as well as his mythic status.

There are several other strong cuts that range from moving to enjoyable. "Gambler's Blues" draws on his knowledge of folk, "Rite of Spring" is a joyful burst of fun, and "Sister Jo" is Dylanesque pop-rock that works as a tribute.

On *Inside*, Bill Morrissey makes you feel what he feels in a way that is honest and real. If he keeps it up, his name will be right up there with the best singer-songwriters. The show will be his first with his new band featuring Johnny Cunningham on fiddle and original Yardbirds guitarist Top Topham.

Dire Straits return Monday for their first local appearance since 1985 and their first-ever show at the Spectrum. The main reason to see this band is leader, guitarist and singer-songwriter Mark Knopfler. The other musicians with the exception of original bassist John Illsley have changed so many times it's impossible to keep track.

Knopfler, of course is one of the greatest and most tasteful guitarists in rock. He is also one of rock's best and more intelligent songwriters. Knopfler is also an extreme perfectionist both in recording and performance. While I still have reservations about their latest album, *For Every Street*, I found it much more enjoyable after giving it a rest of few

(more)

5 Side Brown

months. It's hard to deny Knopfler's guitar work and his solos on the title track are and the other ballads which are the album's best songs are exquisite.

Knopfler is a master of mood and both his shows and albums are exercises in controlled ambiance which each song and sometimes musical interludes that serve as introductions setting you up for what's to come. This doesn't necessarily lead to spontaneity, but Knopfler is anything but a robot and he claims the latest version of the band is his most spontaneous ever.

The last time I saw them was 1980 at a mind-blowing show at Emerald City (this is only their fifth local appearance) where you could walk right up to the stage and be amazed. While there will be no such intimacy at the Spectrum, I'm especially looking forward to the interplay between Knopfler and new member, pedal steel guitarist Paul Franklin.